

LEISURE

The great auto races: New York to Paris, 1908, 2011

Jeff Mahl, great-grandson of 1908 race winner, talks about his modern day re-creation

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Auto club enthusiasts, romantics, adventurers and any lovers of a good story will delight in the presentation to be given by Jeff Mahl on Sunday, Oct. 9, at 7 pm at the Port Jefferson Village Center, 101A E. Broadway: The 1908 and 2011 World Races.

Think about how few paved roads there were when Mahl's great-grandfather, George Schuster, was one of the participants, and the winner, in the 1908 New York to Paris race. Imagine if an auto part was needed that you couldn't just have a new one shipped out for overnight delivery. The problem-solving ingenuity alone that was needed was surely admirable. Snow, cold, flooding and almost any obstacle you could think of combined to make completion of this grueling 169-day marathon a major miracle. The photos in Mahl's show bring that era to life and, combined with his dramatic abilities, make for an engrossing show.

In 2008, the centennial celebration of the historic 1908 race, auto enthusiasts, including Mahl, tried to re-create the route for another race, but travel restrictions with permits not allowed made that impossible.

In 2011 all was set, everything in order, and on Thursday, April 14, at 7 am, in front of the Crowne Plaza Hotel near Times Square, people gathered to watch the very beginning of the 22,000-mile westward journey from New York to Paris. You could just get weary thinking of the myriad arrangements

needed. Hotels, meals, auto club events, museums to visit, town and city receptions, U.S. auto manufacturers to see, and that was just to get to San Francisco.

The cars taking part in the 2011 race ranged from a 1907 Thomas Flyer, to a 1967 Volkswagen "Bug" to a 2011 Ford Expedition. Although the older cars had potentially the same problems that could have befallen those in the 1908 race, modern technology made it much easier to effect solutions.

One of the couples participating in the 2011 race was Ed and Janet Howle. They are the authors of the novel "The Long Road to Paris." This pair was scheduled to compete in the 2008 Great Race, a race which never came to be. They wrote their novel based on the many auto rallies they had participated in and have provided the reader with a most entertaining and engrossing work. They drive a classic 1967 VW Beetle and happily in 2011 were one of the teams to successfully complete the race.

After the road trip across the U.S., the autos in the race journeyed by boat from San Francisco to China, where the drivers met up with their vintage autos to continue the road race. They traveled to many countries including Kazakhstan, Russia, Germany and, naturally, France.

Even with the modern-day conveniences, this was an experience that no one would want to repeat. As Mahl states in his blog, "More than once, each of us questioned our own sanity as we encountered impossible roads, major mechanical breakdowns,



Photo from Jeff Mahl

One of the antique autos in the 2011 race, a 1929 Ford model A, with Jeff Mahl at the wheel and owner Jack Crabtree.

monumental bureaucracy and even physical ailments including dysentery."

The racers arrived in Paris on July 21 — what a remarkable feat.

Don't forget to go to Mahl's blog, <http://worldrace2011.posterous.com> for a detailed look at the race. This evening is cosponsored by the Port Jefferson Conservancy and Danfords Hotel and Marina.

For tickets, call 473-3549 or stop into the Recreation Office on the second floor of the Port Jefferson Village Center in Port Jefferson Village, Monday through Friday, from 10 am to 4 pm. Price is \$10 per person and includes refreshments.